



Rep. Dave Mastin 16th District Legislative Report

*To citizens
of the 16th
District*

Rep. Dave Mastin

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Dear Friends,

The 2004 legislative session concluded on March 11 after 60 days of legislators debating and contemplating new laws. With this session in the books, lawmakers will not reconvene again until January 2005.

There was important legislation that passed this year. In this newsletter, I'll highlight some of these measures that impact K-12 education, food safety, our neighborhoods, and other issues. I'll also discuss our supplemental budget and new primary election system.

This last session also saw some missed opportunities. We failed to enact true tort reform, provide relief to employers, and help make healthcare more affordable and accessible.

Due to election year restrictions, this is the final newsletter I'll be sending you this year. In fact, this will be the last newsletter I send as your state representative.

After 12 years of serving communities of the 16th District in Olympia, I've made the difficult decision to retire from the Legislature. My decision was based on being able to spend more time with my wonderful family as my children grow.

Although I look forward to life after the Legislature, I'll miss being able to help constituents with problems and working on significant public policy issues.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you. It's truly been an honor.

Best Regards.

Dave Mastin

Dave Mastin
State Representative



Rep. Dave Mastin

16th District Legislative Report

A great year for K-12 education

The 2003 legislative session ended up laying the ground work for what turned out to be an important legislative session for K-12 education this year.

We can do no more as a state than to invest in our school and students. A vibrant economy starts with a world-class primary and secondary education. Families also benefit from a strong education system.

While I'm happy with what we were able to accomplish this year, we still have more work to do. **We must address teacher strike issues and be sure the education of our children is never at the mercy of a labor dispute.** It's also important we do more to attract and retain quality teachers, and revise rules to allow for more web-based training to students who would thrive under these conditions.

Here are some K-12 highlights from the 2004 legislative session:

- Requirements for the WASL and graduation were clearly defined. This will allow student multiple and different means of taking the WASL.
- The school district levy base calculation was changed to allow districts to keep more of the money they've raised locally.
- Historic charter schools legislation passed that will allow for the creation of a limited number of public charter schools in the state.

A new primary election system this September

Your right to vote is very important. **The way you vote in this September's primary election has changed.**

A federal court threw out our very popular blanket primary. This forced legislators to go back to the drawing board this year to come up with something new. After a lot of discussions and debate, the Legislature determined that there were feasible and fair primary election systems it could put forth.

Lawmakers ended up passing what is called the Top Two primary system, with an additional option for a Montana-style primary system if the Top Two was deemed unconstitutional in the courts, or if the governor had other ideas.

As it turns out, the governor did have other ideas. In fact, he vetoed the Top Two section of the bill and opted for the Montana primary system instead. This was signed into law.



Like the blanket primary, the Top Two system would have allowed voters to choose from among all candidates. The top two voter-getters, regardless of party affiliation, would then have advanced to the general election.

Under the Montana style primary system, voters must limit their choices to one political party's slate of candidates. Voters' political party preferences are then kept private.

I encourage you to visit the Secretary of State's web site to learn more about this issue.
<http://www.secstate.wa.gov/>

Supplemental budget

The supplemental budget is a mid-course adjustment to our state's general operating budget, which is written every two years. **Adjustments to the supplemental budget are usually minor and focused on accommodating state needs.** These adjustments are not supposed to be policy-driven. Unfortunately, sometimes this occurs.

There will always be philosophical differences in terms of spending for our state budgets. **My belief is that we need to fund our essential state services, while looking for savings in the process. This means holding the line in spending.**

This year, we didn't hold the line in spending for our supplemental budget as much as I hoped for. As a result, I fear lawmakers may have nearly a \$1 billion deficit to contend with next year.



To citizens of the 16th District

Helping make health care insurance more affordable and accessible

Health care insurance is still not accessible and affordable to many people in our state, especially those who work for small employers. According to a report from the Washington State Employment Security Department, nearly 25 percent of Washington's full-time work force, and nearly 75 percent of part-time workers, go without healthcare benefits.

Part of the problem is that there are too many government rules that tell health insurers what they must put in their plans. Unfortunately, these rules hurt consumers. Mandates mean more costs for health insurance providers, and these costs are then passed on to all of us.

The Legislature passed a bill that will begin to provide the flexibility needed to help small employers offer affordable health insurance to their employees. **It is a step in the right direction, but we must look for more comprehensive solutions in the future.**



Addressing "Mad Cow" disease

December 2003 brought us unwanted news when the USDA announced that an adult Holstein cow from a farm in Mabton had been diagnosed with bovine spongiform encephalopathy – or "Mad Cow" disease.

The Legislature quickly reacted to this situation by passing bills this session. **The aim of these measures was to address food safety.**

- One bill makes it a gross misdemeanor to transport or deliver live "downer" cows (non-ambulatory animals which are unable to walk or stand on their own) to ensure that they will not enter the beef supply.
- A second measure prepares Washington to join a federal "cradle-to-grave" animal identification and tracking system. This program is still under development by the U.S. Agriculture Department, but the concept is to utilize computer-chips inserted in animals' ears for tracking livestock.



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Enacting true tort reform

Medical malpractice insurance premiums continue to go up at an incredible rate. This is causing some doctors and other health care providers to either limit or close their services. This is not a good trend for patients.

We should not let this crisis worsen. **The Legislature must enact true liability reforms, which will control the escalating cost of malpractice insurance.**

Other insurance reforms are also necessary to help control costs, which should go a long way in enabling more employers to provide coverage

for their employees:

- Small-group insurance reform
- Long-term care financing
- Healthcare workforce development



District office open

In order to better serve local citizens and provide access to their legislators I, along with Rep. Bill Grant and Sen. Mike Hewitt, share a 16th District legislative office. **This office is staffed by Marge Plumage, who repaced my long-time legislative assistant Maureen Walsh. This office is located at:**

Walla Walla District Office


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